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RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 0149
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 DUSHANBE 001191

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/29/2019

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SUBJECT: GENERAL PETRAEUS' MEETING WITH PRESIDENT RAHMON

CLASSIFIED BY: KENNETH E GROSS, AMBASSADOR, EXEC, DOS.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: In a 75 minute meeting on October 26, President Rahmon pressed General Petraeus to help make Uzbekistan more friendly to Tajikistan, asked for additional bridges and dams, and urged that any post-election government of Afghanistan adequately represent Tajiks. Petraeus assured Rahmon he would work on Uzbekistan's relations with its neighbors, and would increase the amount of cargo transiting Tajikistan to Afghanistan as part of the Northern Distribution Network. End Summary.

AFGHANISTAN - SOME CONCERNS, SOME NONSENSE

¶2. (C) Rahmon, flanked by the Defense Minister, Foreign Relations Adviser Rahmatulloev, and a Ministry of Foreign Affairs interpreter, read brief welcoming remarks in Tajiki and asked for the General's views on the situation in Afghanistan. Petraeus commented that the situation had become more violent as the Taliban regenerated over the last three years. He briefly outlined the status of deliberations on whether and how to increase U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan, noting that a decision on any increases probably would be made in the next two to four weeks. General Petraeus said that the United States would then focus on the security of the Afghan people and work to enhance the ability of the Afghan government to serve its people.

¶3. (C) While a protocol assistant served instant coffee and green tea, Petraeus discussed Pakistan's serious efforts to confront extremists that threatened the country's very existence. Noting that Pakistan was suffering terrorist counterattacks outside the main conflict zone, he said America was determined to help its partners in their fight against extremism and that Tajikistan, which had some recent successes against terrorism, appeared to share this determination. He thanked Rahmon for unlimited overflights to Afghanistan, for support for the French and Spanish forces' need for temporary basing after their departure from Manas, and for transit of non-lethal cargo by land as part of the Northern Distribution Network. To be sure, Petraeus added, the amount of cargo transiting Tajikistan had been limited, but the number was going to increase modestly. And if the road and some bridges could be strengthened, the flow would increase even more.

¶4. (C) Rahmon picked up his prepared remarks again, reading aloud that the Taliban were inflaming the situation in several

provinces of Afghanistan and for the first time since 2001 were active in the north -- this concerned Tajikistan greatly. He continued to read that a Taliban leader had recently threatened Tajikistan because of its support for NDN and that such a threat "is not a trifle." President Karzai had recently told him that Taliban had used helicopters to travel to northern Afghanistan, suggesting they could just as easily fly into Tajikistan.

15. (C) General Petraeus interrupted to say that the story of Taliban helicopters was "nonsense," but that he shared Rahmon's concern about the security situation in northern Afghanistan. Rahmon stopped reading his script, and admitted that Karzai's assertion about the helicopters was made on the eve of elections, saying laughingly that it might have been a signal to Tajikistan not to support Abdullah Abdullah or it could face Taliban attack itself. Nonetheless, Rahmon continued, the Taliban were active in Kunduz province because it lay along the NDN route to Bagram.

SUPPORT PAKISTAN

16. (C) Ignoring his script, the speed of his interpreter's translation, and his earlier effort to speak in Tajiki, Rahmon launched into a familiar speech about Pakistan, saying it was the home of the Taliban and the root of the extremist problem in Central and South Asia, reminding his interlocutors yet again that he had been right all along about this. He reiterated Tajikistan's commitment to fighting extremism and asserted that Tajikistan lacked the resources or geographic advantages that

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allowed other Central Asian states to ignore the Afghan situation. Its national survival depended on stability and peace and Afghanistan. Tajikistan supported Pakistani President Zardari in every forum, including at the last Shanghai Cooperation Organization summit and in his meeting with Russian President Medvedev on October 23, saying that Pakistan was openly at war with the Taliban and deserved the world's full support and could not win without the world's support. Rahmon said he urged Medvedev to cooperate with the United States, "not NATO, but the U.S.A." he emphasized, to fight extremism in Central and South Asia.

17. (C) General Petraeus forcefully agreed with Rahmon, telling him that Rahmon's diplomatic support for Zardari was very important and that success in Afghanistan was impossible without continued Pakistani efforts to reduce terrorist sanctuaries. General Petraeus briefly described the billions of dollars in new funding for security and economic development that the United States Congress had approved for Pakistan.

THE RUSSIAN ANGLE

18. (C) Rahmon continued that at his recent Moscow meeting he had proposed to Medvedev that they revive regular "special services" consultations involving the United States and other parties interested in Afghanistan. Meetings could be held in Dushanbe, Moscow, New Delhi, or the United States. He had pointed out to Medvedev that this would not be a new structure and said Medvedev seemed interested in the idea. In the longer term, the United States and Russia should plan for the post-conflict situation by supporting "some projects" on which they shared common objectives, mainly concerning the economic development of the region. Rahmon noted that at the July quadrilateral summit

in Dushanbe, Medvedev had signed a joint statement that stressed cooperation over competition, including support for the multilaterally funded CASA-1000 project. Russia had previously opposed such multilateral projects in what it considered its "back yard," but had come around.

¶9. (C) Speaking rapidly, his interpreter straining to keep up, Rahmon said that Afghanistan and Pakistan needed electricity, and the USSR had explored power generation projects on the Pyanj River with huge potential to help Afghanistan. The Dustijum Dam was a main example, and Tajikistan needed the support of the United States and of Russia to get financing from multilateral lenders to revive this project. Rahmon said Russia viewed U.S. cooperation with Tajikistan positively and wanted to be actively engaged in developing the region too.

WHO LET THE DOSTUM OUT?

¶10. (C) Rahmon asked who had advised Karzai to invite Abdur Rashid Dostum into his government. Saying he had also raised this with Secretary Clinton and Special Representative Holbrooke at the UNGA, Rahmon said Dostum's alignment with Karzai caused a schism in Afghan society. He said he was not sure what role Turkey meant to play in Afghanistan, but its interference only made the situation worse. Rahmon predicted that Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan would not attend a summit of Afghanistan's neighbors planned by Ankara. General Petraeus emphasized that the United States had opposed Dostum's return to Afghanistan, noting that he personally went to Turkey to urge the government not to allow Dostum to go.

¶11. (C) Rahmon then launched into his most animated stage of the evening, rehashing the story of his longstanding support for the Northern Alliance and the importance of balancing Tajik and other minority interests with Pashtun in any Afghan government. He commented that Karzai had "failed to unify the people" and would fail again if he did not include adequate Tajik participation in his government. Afghanistan needed a real coalition government; if the President was Pashtun, the Prime Minister should be Tajik. Rahmon added that he invited the strongest Tajik opposition leaders to take 30 percent of

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government positions as part of the settlement of the Tajik civil war, and this was a good example for Afghanistan. Former Afghan President Sibghattullah Mojaddedi had recently met with Rahmon in Dushanbe, and Rahmon found Mojaddedi believed that the Karzai government could manage well enough if coalition forces left Afghanistan; but this was simply wrong, Rahmon said, unless there was greater national unity.

IT ALL COMES DOWN TO ANOTHER BRIDGE

¶12. (C) General Petraeus outlined plans for special operations forces to train Tajik forces in March 2010 and the potential for the bridge at Nizhny Pyanj, road improvement projects, and bridge repairs along the NDN route to create a "truly strategic route" for Tajikistan, China, and Kyrgyzstan. He reiterated the U.S. commitment to developing a Tajik peacekeeping unit, and said he looked forward to seeing such a unit deployable in 2011. Petraeus congratulated Rahmon on Tajikistan's success in defeating extremists over the past summer and said the United States wanted to help Tajikistan develop its counterinsurgency capabilities.

¶13. (C) While Petraeus said this, Rahmon became visibly less interested and at times looking away. But he picked up on the final point about counterinsurgency capability, saying in response that Tajikistan could usefully exchange experiences with ISAF forces. General Petraeus said he agreed when Rahmon blurted out "General, I want a new bridge, a bridge, a bridge!" Political relations are good between our countries, Rahmon continued, but we needed "to liven up cooperation." He urged Petraeus to use his personal access to President Obama and Secretary of State Clinton to get financing for more infrastructure projects in Tajikistan.

CURB KARIMOV

¶14. (C) "And," Rahmon said, "I want to know, how have meetings gone with Karimov?" Good, Petraeus replied. Relations with Uzbekistan were improving substantially after a long difficult period. Petraeus said he understood that Uzbekistan had difficult relations with its neighbors, and he always emphasized to Karimov Uzbekistan's common interest with its neighbors in defeating extremism, combating the flow of illegal narcotics, and fostering economic development. Karimov was very eager for more NDN traffic - and that is very helpful - but the United States wanted to ensure that everyone in the region benefitted from NDN. The United States hoped that its bilateral efforts with each country of the region would eventually translate into better relations between the countries themselves, as well.

¶15. (C) Rahmon said forcefully that Tajikistan enjoyed good relations with "every country of the world, except one." He began reeling off the names of countries, some on other continents, to make his point, and then noted that the one problem country also had bad relations with all its neighbors, not only with Tajikistan. "Who can normalize relations?" he asked. Only the European Union and the United States had the influence to alter Uzbek behavior, Rahmon said. Tajikistan served as a buffer for Uzbekistan and needed easier transit of power and road traffic to survive. Petraeus said he would redouble his efforts with President Karimov to encourage better regional relations.

¶16. (C) Rahmon asked for Petraeus' assessment of the post-election period in Afghanistan. Petraeus said Karzai had the best chance of winning, but his victory was not totally assured. Several hundred of the most corruption-tainted polling stations would be closed, and votes which had gone to minor candidates would now be divided between Karzai and Abdullah. President Obama would support whomever won, and the United States and its allies would help the winner to build an effective coalition that could serve the Afghan people. There was no question, Petraeus added, that corruption and lack of services had weakened the legitimacy of the Afghan government,

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and Karzai recognized this problem. Rahmon interjected that the United States must also pay attention to the post-election period, at which point General Petraeus assured him the United States would do just that and thanked him for the meeting.

COMMENT - AN OLD DOG

¶17. (C) Among the usual rehashing of grievances and requests for Dustijum Dam financing, there were two new elements in this meeting. First, while Rahmon has in the past urged us to finance or otherwise support major infrastructure projects as a way to counteract Russian influence in the region, this time he cast such support as a means to cooperate with the Russians on mutual goals. Second, Rahmon made a visible effort to speak Tajiki throughout the meeting. He several times slipped into Russian to express himself better, but then caught himself and switched back to slower, more thought out Tajik phrases. The meeting was very friendly in overall tone. End Comment.

¶18. (U) General Petraeus cleared this message.
GROSS